

Delano Newsletter - January 18, 1966 - en la Huelga

Picketing in Delano. Last week on Friday we had our largest picketline to date. About 150 FWA and ANCC (Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee) pickets lined up a half a mile along side a field and were successful in "breaking" a crew--the number of pickets on our lines has always been the decisive factor. Schenley is still keeping ahead of us in bringing in out-of-area workers to scab in the vineyards. But Schenley is the easiest to break; men brought into Delano always get fed up after a few days, especially when they find out about the strike. We are now using several powerful transistorized bull-horns on the lines. With them we have discovered new talents of persuasive talking among the men and women on our lines. Broke an Arab crew of 35 or 40 yesterday out on a ranch on Quality Road.

Second Launching of "El Teatro Campesino." This last weekend Luis Vladez and his troubador-actors did several performances, formal and informal in the Bakersfield area; coming up this week is a show on the Stanford campus in Palo Alto. A month and a half ago, our little theater-picket group was about six strong, rich with natural talent, but was dispersed somewhat when pickets were sent out to S.F., L.A. and El Paso, Texas. Recently Luis has been breaking in some new people and they are doing very well. The format is simple, ~~sketches being set up together that in itself gives all in for a show~~ simple, short skits tied together with Luis's informal comments about the strike. (He being our picket captain gives all this unimpeachable authority. When the show is on the road, and Luis and the others are missing, the picketline suffers as a result.) Their finest routine (in this critic's opinion) is a dramatized reading of Jack London's famous definition of a scab ("After God had finished the rattlesnake...") Only two personna are involved, a drunken esquirol (scab) and his "conscience" who reads him this scathing--and, as it turns out--edifying bit from Union history. As it develops, the "Teatro" is becoming a highly effective means of reaching the Mexican farm worker with ideas and attitudes by which members of the Association are fulfilling their long-held aspirations to greater and more secure participation in the community at large.

Boycott News. Plans are being made for a major new innovation during the first week of February. We are still receiving word of new committees forming; San Diego is in swing and moving. Ceser just came back from New York last night and reports that Bob Solodow's efforts on the East Coast are developing well, but that he needs help there in maintaining the effort in so many cities. Bob shuttles around much between New York, Washington, cities in New Jersey and New England. Printed materials and buttons we send him from our little office here in Delano.

More on Picketing in Delano. Today Wendy is holding a press conference to bring attention to the recent flood of workers being pulled out from Schenley and other ranches struck by the two unions. (Cooperation between our two groups is still solid, especially on the picketlines out in the fields, where both groups are now devoting their principle striking activity.)

Jack the Giant Killer: Last week we drew State-wide headlines in an activity, though not related to the strike, typical of the normal Association work done here to secure the rights of farm workers. We find ourselves watch-dog, prod, and advocate/counsel on behalf of our members to the two county welfare offices at whose mercy one stands when hit by the winter's low in pay and available work. Our Salvador Gonzalez took a small group of recipients, some of whom had been denied aid unfairly, and picketed offices of the Tulare County Welfare Department. What a scandal! At the same time telegrams were sent to Secretary of Health, Welfare and Education, the Governor, and the top state welfare official, requesting investigation of the county's practices. The results were immediate and fully vindicated our dissatisfaction. The investigators who were sent in response, were quoted welfare laws by Sal which they had never heard of before! They left favorably impressed with our case against the Department, and promised action. (And we'll stay on'em.)

Heavy Bails Reduced by Volunteer Attorney, Beverly Axelrad. Several of our bravest and best pickets were held several days on fantastic felony charges, then finally released on their own recognizance with far lesser allegations hanging on them. (Lack of any on-the-spot legal help has been a constant source of difficulty to the strike here--but it is by no means a new predicament for the Mexican-American farm worker.) Miss Axelrad was warmly praised at last Tuesday's general picket meeting by Epifanio Camacho, one of those she was able to help. Savings in bail money was in the thousands of dollars.

Picketing in Delano. We are observing more and more "down-and-outs" and unfortunates being recruited into the Delano area by the labor contractors and growers. This observation is confirmed by local liquor dealers who recognize their occasional trade drifting in from Bakersfield and Los Angeles. Morale on our picket lines is very good now, with only an occasional slow day. Workers newly-brought into the area are still joining the strike effort every day as they learn about our strike. Our pickets descend on a field where they are working, and they soon learn.

A New Kitchen at our Out-of-Town Strike Store. We are now able to provide most of our own meals for our pickets in an old kitchen out in the country. Visitors who drop in to cheer and encourage us, and stay for a meal, may get some old-country chicken "mole", corn tortillas and real Mexican beans. A "one-big-happy-family" feeling prevails as the pickets come in chilled, and weary of the day's work on the line. Wives of the strikers are really pitching in to make it work; we may have to reinstitute our day-care activity to take care of the children who come along to be with mama.

Christmas in Delano. Several truckloads arrived with marvelous toys, children's clothing, bikes and happy-wrapped, mysterious packages. A gigantic Christmas party for the kids was held at the AWOC Hall before Christmas where the first batch of gifts were distributed; then more later, which the parents on strike had a chance to pick out for their children. (We suspect that local merchants, especially those who sell toys, are now working behind the scenes encouraging conciliation, as the Xmas-business chickens have surely come home to roost.) We are grateful to those people who made our Christmas time a happy occasion. Turkeys, upwards of 400, were given to us by UAW workers and Packing-house workers back East. The rigors of picketing eased on several late afternoons so that we could go caroling in the evenings. (We caroled the homes of our "favorite" labor contractors, and were accused of "twisting" the Spirit of Christmas by the local paper.) Christmas time brought back to Delano some of our L.A. and S.F.-based pickets for a joyous reunion.

The El Paso Project. The FWA's dynamic vice-president, Dolores Huerta left soon after the 1st to head up the effort to block Delano-area corporation ranches of their strike-breaking recruitment in El Paso and Ciudad Juarez. Workers are charged \$30 so as to arrive and work their first days in Delano as indentured scabs! With her are several other of our experienced people, engaged in contacting local church, union and community people to get their support. We also have legal moves afoot to bring about a Department of Labor investigation of these recruitment practices--especially to the ranches here against which we have managed to get official certifications of a labor dispute. (This step was made difficult for us early in the strike by local state officials.)

The Nationwide Boycott of Schenley Products and Delano Grapes. Recent word from Chicago is very encouraging; many denominations, union and civil rights people cooperating at committee-level for making the boycott effective. Every day brings word of more cities; today, Cambridge, Mass. and Oklahoma City. Here locally we are beginning to get "feed-back" which we know is the measure of the boycott's effectiveness. Headlines in today's Delano Record: "Demand for Delano Grapes Jumps;" also Schenley is beginning to make very defensive statements and run adds proclaiming (falsely) their 100% union-made wines and whiskies.

Publication of Strike Account Soon. The FWA's Eugene Nelson finished his 200-odd page m.s. telling of the first 100 days of the Huelga--it's entitled Huelga. (Yes, this is a plug: it costs \$1.50 postpaid to the Farm Worker Press, P.O. Box 1060, Delano, Calif.) Publication is due by late January. Gene has been an FWA volunteer since last summer and brings to his writing effort his past experience as a short story writer and novelist.

This is about all the news for now. VIVA LA CAUSA!

RF

M/6

June 23, '66

THE DELANO NEWSLETTER

The events of the past weeks have been hectic and varried. Tuesday, June 21st, we were holding our weekly picket meeting and celebrating the signing of the Schenley contract when the meeting was interrupted by a telegram from Di Giorgio. It was to inform us that we were to be on the ballot of an election to be held here and at Di Giorgio's operations in Borrego Springs on the 24th. They made all the decisions unilaterally----who was to officiate, who was to referee, who was to vote, who would be on the ballot and where and when it was to take place. Never before in labor history has a union agreed to an election after ten months of striking, in which the strikers were not allowed to vote, in which the union had no part in the procedures of the election or the time or place it was to be held, in which there was no impartial third party to referee, and in which we were not allowed pre-election electioneering. We immediately smelled the phoniness of the election and, wanting no part in it, obtained an injunction to have our name removed from the ballot. We called for a boycott of the fraudulent, "free" election. 500 striking farm workers were picketing across the street from the polling places here and at Borrego Springs. Several hundred workers refused to participate in the phony elections.

Some of the workers were pressured and intimidated into voting. They were herded into company busses and trucks and brought to the polling places. When Di Giorgio officials realized that nearly half of the workers could not be forced to vote even by violence, large numbers of non-farm workers were brought in and permitted to vote. This included custodial, culinary, and building traded workers. Farm workers who had refused to vote and returned to work were brought back to the polling place two and three times, and in many cases they were physically pulled toward the polling place by foremen and foreladies. Many workers avoided voting by staying home.

Of those intimidated and cajoled into voting, the majority was persuaded into voting for the Teamsters by DiGiorgio's "precinct workers".

This type of tyranny cannot go on un-checked. Governor Brown, at the request of the NFWA, has ordered an immediate investigation of the election. In addition, letters have been sent to Senators Harrison Williams and Robert Kennedy calling for a senatorial investigation. Both senators have urged the DiGiorgio Corporation to postpone contract negotiations pending the outcome of the investigation.

BOYCOTT NEWS \* \* \* \* \*

While DiGiorgio continues to use every tactic possible to defeat the NFWA's efforts, we continue to gain momentum in our struggle. DiGiorgio must realize that every week means more and more loss of sales, and more and more public rejection of GiGiorgio despotism.

This past week has been the best week of the boycott, and there is every sign that the boycott will continue to build as the summer goes on. The NFWA has called for a more intensified consumer boycott of DiGiorgio products, and as part of our plan to step-up nation-wide boycott activities, ten new boycott centers will be well under way within the next week in Denver, Minneapolis, Portland, Seattle, Washington D. C., Santa Barbara, Philadelphia, El Paso, and San Diego. All of these cities will be staffed by an NFWA summer student volunteer. In addition, many of the existing boycott centers will be reinforced by students.